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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7585
INFO RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 0821
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0697
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 1535
RUEHKU/AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY 0845
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY 0194
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 0599
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0066
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0070
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA/DSCA// PRIORITY
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S E C R E T ANKARA 004405

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/01/2031
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [MARR](#) [ETTC](#) [SA](#) [SY](#) [IR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY SYMPATHETIC BUT NEEDS EVIDENCE TO REQUIRE
SYRIAN AND IRANIAN PASSENGER PLANE LANDINGS

REF: A. STATE 124945
[1](#)B. ANKARA 4279

Classified By: Charge Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request. Please see para. 6.

[1](#)2. (S) SUMMARY: MFA Aviation Department Head Olcay welcomed information on possible Syrian and Iranian use of passenger flights to transfer weapons. He raised the possible abuse of VIP flights from Syria and Iran, noting that one such flight had overflown Turkish airspace without the VIP it was slated to carry. Olcay emphasized, however, that the coerced landing and search of passenger flights was a highly sensitive political issue and Turkey could not take action absent specific information. Post requests Washington assistance to identify further information that can be shared with Turkey about the potential flights or the actions taken by other countries to thwart the abuse of passenger flights. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (S) Per ref a, on Aug. 1 we notified Aviation Department Head Hamit Olcay of possible Syrian and Iranian use of passenger aircraft for weapons transfers. Olcay appreciated the new information but reiterated ref b points that it would be politically sensitive for Turkey to request the landing and search of passenger flights under Article V of the Chicago Convention without specific evidence. Syria and Iran are criticizing Turkey for its decision to request the landing and inspection of cargo flights, he said. PM Erdogan will attend the emergency OIC meeting on Lebanon in Malaysia on Aug. 2 and expects to receive complaints from the Syrian and Iranian delegations about the detention of humanitarian flights. Pars Airlines has made three overflight requests and has complied with the landing and search requirement each time. According to Olcay, only tents and other humanitarian goods were found. However, since Turkey invoked Article V, it has received no further official Syrian or Iranian cargo overflight requests.

[1](#)4. (S) Olcay raised the possibility that Syria and Iran might also abuse VIP flights. On July 30 Turkey received an overflight request for a Syrian VIP. Given the Lebanon situation, Olcay said, the MFA is doing a thorough review of

all overflight requests and pressed Syria for the name of the VIP. Syria complied, providing the name of a Deputy Foreign Minister, and Turkey granted overflight clearance. Turkey later learned that the named VIP was not on the plane. "They are playing a cat and mouse game" said Olcay, but underscored that the political ramifications for Turkey would be significant if the GOT requested a VIP plane to land. Turkey would need specific, credible evidence before taking this step.

¶5. (S) Separately, Arms Control and Disarmament Acting Head of Department Serhan Yigit, whose office is peripherally engaged on this issue, raised the possibility that putting Syria and Iran on notice that a check of passenger flights is being considered might deter their use of those flights. COMMENT: MFA Aviation has the lead on this issue and it is unclear if the Arms Control Department will have any influence on GOT actions. END COMMENT.

¶6. (S) ACTION REQUEST: Post would appreciate any further information that can be shared with Turkey regarding either the potential flights or the actions being taken by other countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia) to thwart the abuse of passenger flights. If the GOT is convinced that other countries have cut off alternative avenues of transport, leaving Turkey as the primary route, it may be more willing to act.

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